

# Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

## Bible Study Notes: Isaiah Chapter 38 - 40

4/30/14

### Chapter 38 Study Notes

#### Hezekiah's Illness - Verses 1-22

1 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." 2 Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, 3 "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: 5 "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.' 7 " 'This is the LORD's sign to you that the LORD will do what he has promised: 8 I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.' " So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down. 9 A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery: 10 I said, "In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?" 11 I said, "I will not again see the LORD, the LORD, in the land of the living; no longer will I look on mankind, or be with those who now dwell in this world. 12 Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. 13 I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. 14 I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!" 15 But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. 16 Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. 17 Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. 18 For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. 19 The living, the living--they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness. 20 The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD. 21 Isaiah had said, "Prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil, and he will recover." 22 Hezekiah had asked, "What will be the sign that I will go up to the temple of the LORD?"

**38:1-22** The events of chapters 38 and 39 happened before those of chapters 36 and 37.

**38:1-5** When Isaiah went to Hezekiah, who was extremely ill, and told him of his impending death, Hezekiah immediately turned to God. God responded to his prayer, allowing Hezekiah to live another 15 years. If you have a desperate need in your life, bring it to the Lord. In response to fervent prayer, God may change the course of your life, too. Never hesitate to ask God for help.

**38:1-6** According to 2 Chronicles 32:24-26, Hezekiah had a problem with pride even after this double miracle of healing and deliverance. Eventually he and his subjects humbled themselves, so God's judgment was put off for several more generations. 38:16-18 Hezekiah realized that his prayer

brought deliverance and forgiveness. His words "the grave cannot praise you" may reveal that he was unaware of the blessedness of the future life for those who trust in God (57:1-2), or he may have meant that dead bodies cannot praise God. In either case, Hezekiah knew that God had spared his life, so in his poem Hezekiah praises God. Hezekiah recognized the good that came from his bitter experience. The next time you have difficult struggles, pray for God's help to gain something beneficial from them.

**38:19** Hezekiah spoke of the significance of passing the joy of the Lord from generation to generation. The heritage of our faith has come to us because of faithful men and women who have carried God's message to us across the centuries. Do you share with your children or other young people the excitement of your relationship with God?

## Chapter 39 Study Notes

### Envoys From Babylon - Verses 1-8

**1** At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. **2** Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses--the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. **3** Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, "What did those men say, and where did they come from?" "From a distant land," Hezekiah replied. "They came to me from Babylon." **4** The prophet asked, "What did they see in your palace?" "They saw everything in my palace," Hezekiah said. "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them." **5** Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: **6** The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. **7** And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." **8** "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."

**39:1-8** Marduk-Baladan, a Babylonian prince, was planning a revolt against Assyria and was forming an alliance. He probably hoped to convince Hezekiah to join this alliance against Assyria. Hezekiah, feeling honored by this attention and perhaps feeling some sympathy for their proposal, showed the Babylonian envoys his treasures. But Isaiah warned the king not to trust Babylon. Someday they would turn on Judah and devour Jerusalem's wealth.

**39:4-7** What was so wrong about showing these Babylonians around? Hezekiah failed to see that the Babylonians would become his next threat, and that they, not the Assyrians, would conquer his city. When Isaiah told him that Babylon would someday carry it all away, this was an amazing prophecy because Babylon was struggling for independence under Assyria. Hezekiah's self-satisfied display of his earthly treasures brought its own consequences (2 Kings 25; Daniel 1:1-2). His response (39:8) may seem a bit shortsighted, but he simply was expressing gratitude for the blessing from God that peace would reign during his lifetime and that God's judgment would not be more severe.

**39:8** Hezekiah, one of Judah's most faithful kings, worked hard throughout his reign to stamp out idol worship and to purify the worship of the true God at the Jerusalem temple. Nevertheless, he knew his kingdom was not pure. Powerful undercurrents of evil invited destruction, and only God's miraculous interventions preserved Judah from its enemies. Here Hezekiah was grateful that God would preserve

peace during his reign. As soon as Hezekiah died, the nation rushed back to its sinful ways under the leadership of Manasseh, Hezekiah's son. He actually rebuilt the centers of idolatry his father had destroyed.

## Chapter 40 Study Notes

### Comfort for God's People

**1** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. **2** Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. **3** A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. **4** Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. **5** And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." **6** A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. **7** The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. **8** The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." **9** You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" **10** See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. **11** He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. **12** Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? **13** Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? **14** Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? **15** Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. **16** Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. **17** Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. **18** To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? **19** As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. **20** A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. **21** Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? **22** He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. **23** He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. **24** No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. **25** "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. **26** Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. **27** Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? **28** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. **29** He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of

the weak. **30** Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; **31** but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

**40:1-31** The book of Isaiah makes a dramatic shift at this point. The following chapters discuss the majesty of God, who is coming to rule the earth and judge all people. God will reunite Israel and Judah and restore them to glory. Instead of warning the people of impending judgment, Isaiah here comforts them. Chapter 40 refers to the restoration after the Exile. Cyrus is the instrument of their deliverance from Babylon. Secondly, it looks to the end of time when "Babylon"—the future evil world system—will be destroyed and the persecution of God's people will end.

**40:1-2** Judah still had 100 years of trouble before Jerusalem would fall, then 70 years of exile. So God tells Isaiah to speak tenderly and to comfort Jerusalem. The seeds of comfort may take root in the soil of adversity. When your life seems to be falling apart, ask God to comfort you. You may not escape adversity, but you may find God's comfort as you face it. Sometimes, however, the only comfort we have is in the knowledge that someday we will be with God. Appreciate the comfort and encouragement found in his Word, his presence, and his people.

**40:3-5** Preparing a straight highway means removing obstacles and rolling out the red carpet for the coming of the Lord. The wilderness is a picture of life's trials and sufferings. We are not immune to these, but our faith need not be hindered by them. Isaiah told people to prepare to see God work. John the Baptist used these words as he challenged the people to prepare for the coming Messiah (Matthew 3:3).

**40:6-8** People are compared here to grass and flowers that wither away. We are mortal, but God's Word is eternal and unfailing. Public opinion changes and is unreliable, but God's Word is constant. Only in God's eternal Word will we find lasting solutions to our problems and needs.

**40:11** God is often pictured as a shepherd, gently caring for and guiding his flock. He is powerful (40:10), yet careful and gentle. He is called a shepherd (Psalm 23); the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14); the great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20); and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Note that the shepherd is caring for the most defenseless members of his society: children and those caring for them. This reinforces the prophetic theme that the truly powerful nation is not the one with a strong military, but rather the one that relies on God's caring strength.

**40:12-31** Isaiah describes God's power to create, his provision to sustain, and his presence to help. God is almighty and all-powerful; but even so, he cares for each of us personally. No person or thing can be compared to God (40:25). We describe God as best we can with our limited knowledge and language, but we only limit our understanding of him and his power when we compare him to what we experience on earth. What is your concept of God, especially as revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ? Don't limit his work in your life by underestimating him.

**40:29-31** Even the strongest people get tired at times, but God's power and strength never diminish. He is never too tired or too busy to help and listen. His strength is our source of strength. When you feel all of life crushing you and you cannot go another step, remember that you can call upon God to renew your strength.

**40:31** Hoping in the Lord is expecting that his promise of strength will help us to rise above life's distractions and difficulties. Do you believe God loves you and wants the best for you? Can you relax, confident that his purposes are right? Are you convinced that he has the power to control all of life—and your life as well? Though your faith may be struggling or weak, accept his provisions and care for you.